

CALIFORNIA

OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

MEETING AND CONVENTION PLANNERS

CALIFORNIA OCCUPATIONAL GUIDE - NUMBER 553
2002

INTEREST AREA
PROFESSIONAL AND MANAGERIAL



WHAT DOES A MEETING AND CONVENTION PLANNER DO?

The meeting and convention industry has emerged as one of today's most significant sectors of commerce. Crucial to this field are MEETING AND CONVENTION PLANNERS, who plan and produce smoothly run conventions, meetings, seminars, and expositions within budget.

Meeting Planners, sometimes called Convention Managers, are found both in small companies and in large private corporations, in professional associations, and at visitors and convention bureaus. Some own meeting planning businesses or are employed there as part of a staff.

The work performed by Meeting Planners can be divided into the following responsibilities:

- Program development
- Marketing and promotion
- Budgeting
- Site selection
- Negotiation
- Travel arrangements
- Entertainment and speakers
- Food arrangements
- Trade show management
- Guest programs
- Reservations and registration
- Audio-visual equipment
- Public relations
- Program evaluation

Planners on a large staff for associations and convention bureaus may be assigned one specific aspect of the event such as budgeting or handling reservations and registration, while Planners who work for smaller organizations will often take responsibility for all phases of the event.

In workplaces with several Meeting Planners, three levels of professionalism exist: the *Facilitator*, the *Technician*, and the *Professional*. The Facilitator may be assigned basic tasks such as choosing menus and working with the chosen hotel on a variety of details. This worker is usually concerned with the physical needs of the attendees. The Technician is often responsible for running registration and reservations, selecting and setting up the site, and operating the budget. The Professional designs and sells the event, creates the budget, and oversees all operations.

It is this top-level manager who is responsible for achieving the meeting's overall objective: the communication goal of the client.

Meeting Planners working within a corporation have a captive audience; they plan sales and incentive meetings or training seminars for their employees. Planners who represent associations or convention bureaus have the added burden of selling the event and/or location to businesses, associations, and prospective attendees. While Planners for convention and visitors bureaus do not typically organize meetings and conventions for others, they do stage "familiarization" trips to attract Meeting Planners from associations and corporations to their city.

When marketing is required, Meeting Planners may produce brochures and other publications, handle direct mail operations, and conduct member surveys to help sell and plan association programs and services.

The massive logistical operation of a large convention, trade show or exposition often starts as many as five years before the event. The first step, booking space in halls and hotels, often must be done years in advance. Then, one or two years before the event, Meeting Planners begin developing topics, choosing featured speakers and creating agendas. Much of the work also involves coordinating with other organizations and companies who will present programs and set up booths. Sometimes hundreds of vendors will exhibit their services or products.

WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT?

Some of the important skills, knowledge, and abilities for Meetings and Convention Planners include the following:

- Coordination – Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions.
- Speaking – Talking to others to effectively convey information.
- Management of Personnel Resources – Motivating, developing, and directing people as they work, identifying the best people for the job.
- Problem Identification – Identifying the nature of problems.
- Implementation Planning – Developing approaches for implementing an idea.
- Active Listening – Listening to what other people are saying and asking questions as appropriate.
- Time Management – Managing one's own time and the time of others.
- Service Orientation – Actively looking for ways to help people.
- Computers – Knowing how to use text and spreadsheet programs, plus Internet search capability.

WHAT'S THE WORK ENVIRONMENT?

Meeting Planners generally do their work in comfortable, well-lighted, well-ventilated offices and meeting sites. The job, however, can involve a considerable amount of standing, lifting, walking, and kneeling when preparing materials and directing the set-up for the event. Many Planners travel regularly on the job, some internationally. The pressure of keeping track of hundreds of details before and during an event can be mentally exhausting for some workers.

Union Membership

According to Meeting Professionals International, so far there has been little or no unionization of Meeting Planners.

WHAT'S THE CALIFORNIA JOB OUTLOOK?

According to the Occupational Employment Statistics Survey, there were 4,010 Meeting and Convention Planners employed in California in 1999. This survey does not include self-employed Planners.

The employment outlook for Meeting Planners is highly dependent upon the economy. One of the first things to be cut back are meetings and conventions. Economic downturns tend to displace some employed Planners, but may also increase outsourcing or contract work for independent Planners.

Trends

According to Meeting Professionals International, the Internet has not had much impact on

employment of Meeting Planners to date. There is no firm prediction as to whether “virtual meetings” will replace the real thing, at least not yet.

WHAT DOES THE JOB PAY?

California Earnings

Meeting and Convention Planners 2001 Wages

Hourly wages range from	\$15.07 to \$25.69
Average hourly wage	\$20.87
Average annual wage	\$43,394

Source: *Occupational Employment Survey of Employers* by EDD/LMID.

A salary survey conducted by Meeting Planners International and published in the May 2000 *Meeting Manager* magazine shows the following western regional average yearly salaries:

Corporate Planners	\$59,825
Association Planners	\$47,759
Independent Planners	\$63,152
University Planners	\$38,333
Government Planners	\$45,000
Religious Planners	\$38,500

About 45 percent of the workers earn straight salaries, while the balance earns salary-plus-commission, bonuses, fees, mark-ups, and/or hourly compensation.

Hours

Meeting and Convention Planners usually work a 40-hour workweek except during an event, when they typically work long hours overseeing its set-up, duration, and “tear-down” phases. Travel time is also needed for Planners who manage events in other locations.

Benefits

Meeting Planners who work full time and are employed by associations, corporations, colleges, or government agencies typically receive medical, dental, and vision insurance; vacation and sick leave; and holidays. Larger firms also offer profit sharing and pension plans. Self-employed Planners are responsible for their own benefits.

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE JOB?

Education and Training

Many of today's Meeting and Convention Planners began their careers as administrative assistants or secretaries who assisted in meeting planning and gradually assumed additional responsibilities. The occupation has become increasingly professional over the past several years. Examples of this are as follows:

- A widespread certification program
- Several professional organizations
- A growing core of knowledge to master
- Budgets that can run into millions of dollars

Today most Planners have at least a college degree, and some have masters or post-graduate degrees, often in fields such as business, communications, and travel/tourism management. Many California colleges and universities offer credit courses in meeting and convention planning, through extension programs.

Persons wanting to enter this field usually start by learning the meeting planning business on a small scale, often as part of a job's duties in a company. They may also work for self-employed Meeting Planners or as assistants to planners in associations. Some enter this field from the hotel/restaurant industry, having worked at conventions or large meetings in a variety of capacities. It should be noted that although experience can be gained by arranging weddings and catering parties for acquaintances or family members, this type of experience alone is rarely sufficient to be hired as a Meeting Planner without having a broader work history in event planning and obtaining certification.

Planners must be familiar with using the Internet to make air and hotel arrangements or research sites and availability for events. They also need to be knowledgeable about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) so they can ensure everyone has adequate access to, and seating for, the event.

Good oral and written communications skills are essential to this field, as well as proficiency in a variety of computer programs including desktop

publishing and spreadsheets. Students wanting to prepare for this career should take courses in business, composition, speech, and computer science.

Licensing and Certification

To qualify for the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) exam, persons must have worked full time for at least three years with a wide variety of meeting planning experience. Although certification is not required for this occupation, it will likely be an advantage when competing for better jobs. The Certified Meeting Manager (CMM) certificate is earned through an advanced training program, usually lasting one week, and successful analysis and completion of a detailed case study. Meeting Professionals International administers both exams.

Continuing Education

Continuing education is not required to maintain a position as a Meeting Planner; however, successful Meeting Planners regularly attend seminars, workshops, conventions, and trade meetings – as well as look at trade journals and Web sites – to keep abreast of trends in the industry.

HOW DO I FIND THE JOB?

Persons should keep in regular contact with their professional associations for contacts and leads. Meeting Planners International offers a service on its Web site where candidates can post their resumes for review by interested employers and view job openings.

Direct application to employers remains one of the most effective job search methods. Private firms are listed in the yellow pages under Conference Centers, Party Planning and Event Consultants, Convention Services and Facilities, Public Relations Services, Halls and Auditoriums, Banquet Facilities, and Hotels. California job openings can be found at various online job-listing systems including CalJOBSSM at www.caljobs.ca.gov or at America's Job Bank at www.ajb.dni.us.

For other occupational and wage information and a listing of the largest employers in any county, visit the Employment Development Department

Labor Market Information Web page at www.calmis.ca.gov. Find further job search assistance from your nearest Job Service office www.edd.ca.gov/jsloc.htm or the closest One-Stop site listed on the California WorkNet site, www.sjtcc.ca.gov/sjtccweb/one-stop.

WHERE CAN THIS JOB LEAD?

On a large Meeting Planning staff, advancement is sometimes achieved by promoting from Facilitator to Technician and on to Professional. Once Professionals have a base of contacts and the capital, they are capable of starting their own business. Large associations, corporations, and convention bureaus whose events usually involve massive budgets may look for people with specialties in accounting, marketing or public relations, in addition to several years experience and certification in meeting planning.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Meeting Professionals International (MPI)
International Headquarters
4455 LBJ Freeway, Suite 1200
Dallas, TX 75244-5903
(972) 702-3000
Fax: (972) 702-3070
www.mpiweb.org

Meeting Professionals International
Northern California Chapter
2950 Buskirk Avenue, Suite 170
Walnut Creek, CA 94596
(925) 472-5902
Fax: (925) 472-5903
www.nccmpi.org

Meeting Professionals International
Sacramento Chapter
530 Bercut Drive, Suite G
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 443-0363
Fax: (916) 325-9990
www.mpisacramento.com

Meeting Professionals International
Southern California Chapter
1250 Long Beach Avenue, Suite 323
Los Angeles, CA 90021
(213) 629-4247
Fax: (213) 624-2229
www.mpiscc.com

Convention Industry Council
8201 Greensboro Drive, Suite 300
McLean, VA 22102
(703) 610-9030
(800) 725-8982
Fax: (703) 610-9005
www.conventionindustry.org

Employment Projections by Occupation
www.calmis.ca.gov/htmlfile/subject/occproj.htm

Employment and Wages by Occupation
[www.calmis.ca.gov/file/occup\\$/OES\\$.htm](http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/occup$/OES$.htm)

RELATED OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

Hotel and Motel Managers	No. 114
Human Resources Specialists and Managers	No. 135

OCCUPATIONAL CODE REFERENCES

SOC (*Standard Occupational Classification*)
Meeting and Convention Planners 13-1121

O*NET (*Occupational Information Network*)
Meeting and Convention Planners 13-1121.00

OES (*Occupational Employment Statistics*)
Food Service and Lodging Managers 15026
Management Support Workers, NEC 21999

DOT (*Dictionary of Occupational Titles*)
Managers, Convention 187.167-078